

Septuagesima- February 16, 2025
Text: Matthew 20:1-16
Theme: God is the Giver of All Good Things

You might remember that we switched to the one-year lectionary beginning with Advent this church year. One of the differences in the one-year lectionary is that we have a pre-Lenten season between the season of Epiphany and Lent. This was designed to give us a chance to slow down after all the excitement of being on the mountain-top during Christmas and Epiphany. We begin to prepare ourselves for entering the valley of Lent which will culminate with Good Friday as we commemorate the death of Christ. These pre-Lenten Sundays are called Septuagesima Sunday, Sexagesima Sunday, and Quinquagesima Sunday, simple meaning 70, 60, and 50 days before the Resurrection.

Our prayer of the day today asks God, "...hear the prayers of Your people that we who justly suffer the consequence of our sin may be mercifully delivered by Your goodness to the glory of Your name..." This is a good prayer as we get ready for Lent. We remember that sin has consequences. This is a hard reality. Sometimes we focus so much on the forgiveness that we negate the consequences. We're tempted to say things like "but it's not fair." We hear that a great deal from children who want to avoid consequences by appealing to some idea of fairness. I only did what

someone else was already doing! I didn't hurt anyone! I'm owed something for some other injustice I've suffered. Kids don't like the idea of doing the time if you did the crime. Of course, neither do we. We're just more politic about the way we say it. Kids are more honest.

In the prayer, we admit that we suffer consequences because sometimes we choose to sin. Period. But we pray that God, in His goodness will eventually deliver us from those consequences. Not because we're basically good people. We're not. We are corrupted from within. Not because we earned deliverance with our good works. We have not. No amount of works can pay for even the smallest of sins because God has already said that the wages of sin is death. We pray that He would deliver us from the consequences of our sin only because of His goodness and so that He might glorify His name by delivering His child.

Jesus explicates this very truth in the Gospel for today. As we prepare to enter the valley of Lent, we remember that everything we have, whatever we have, is because of God's rich mercy and grace. The owner of the vineyard hired workers to work in his vineyard. He hired various workers throughout the day and decided to pay all of them the same wage. We can understand why the ones who started in the morning might get miffed that the ones

who only worked an hour got the same pay as they did. Who among us would blame them? Capitalism does not work that way, but God is not a capitalist.

God is a pure giver. He never stops giving. His system would be an utter failure in a sinful world. That is why Communism and Socialism do not work. It's a nice idea for everyone to work as hard as they are able and share equally in the rewards of the hard-working community. A lovely idea. Why doesn't it work? Sin! We live in a sin-fallen world and people will never work as hard as they can for the good of the community and no one will ever be happy with a slice of the pie that is smaller than they think it ought to be.

But with God, it is different. Not only do we not need to earn His gifts but in fact we cannot even if we wanted to. I think the constant challenge for us in this life is to learn to be more like God and ignore our sinful human nature. Rather than being concerned about who is getting more or less than we, perhaps we can just rejoice that we have what we need and even some extra blessings beside. Rather than always trying to make sure that we don't give more than we receive, perhaps we could focus on giving everything we can and letting God worry about what we receive.

When I was in my late 20's, one of my friends was a Lutheran teacher. We worked closely together on many things revolving

around our school and the youth ministry. One night we were drinking beer together after a particularly grueling week and we decided to figure out our hours for that week. The minimum wage had just gone up to \$4.25 an hour. We figured out that we had each worked about 80 hours that week. We had made about \$6 an hour that week. He had 4 years post high school and I had 8 and we were making \$1.75 an hour more than the high schooler bagging groceries. It was disheartening, but I thought a lot about it and realized that I didn't really care. I was doing what I loved to do, what I felt called to do. I knew that God would provide for me whatever I really needed. He did, and He always has.

It does not matter if you started the first hour or the eleventh. It does not matter if you have been a model Christians your whole life or just began following Jesus last week, God will give you whatever you need to accomplish whatever He lays before you. He will also give the person next to you whatever they need. He knows what we need and He will supply it. Danya and I often look back at our lives together and wonder how we survived during the really lean years. We survived and even thrived because it was never up to us to provide. It was always God.

So, as we head towards Lent, we remember that nothing about out eternal life is based on us. Those who sin much are saved the

same way those who sin little are. Of course, we always hope that as one grows in faith, his love for God will put limitations on his sin, but nevertheless, all sin is forgiven on the cross. Yes, we suffer consequences for our sin in this life. Sometimes those consequences are obvious, such as when a person goes to jail for a crime or when someone has a horrible disease that is directly related to his lifestyle. But far more often, we never see the consequences that others are suffering. Sometimes we wrongly assume that there are no consequences. There are always consequences for sin whether seen or unseen. However, it doesn't matter because every sin is forgiven. When the twelfth hour comes, regardless of what you have done or left undone, everyone who believes in Jesus will be ushered into paradise. So, while we grieve our sins, we are not bound to them or by them. We are the freed, saved children of God.

The Psalmist said it best in Psalm 130

**Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD! O Lord, hear my voice!
Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my pleas for mercy! If
you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand? But
with you there is forgiveness, that you may be feared.**